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THE
C A S E
OF THE
Protestant Dissenters ,
REPRESENTED and ARGUED.

Licensed and Entred according to Order.

THEY are under one common Obligation with the rest of Mankind, by the universal Law of Nature, to Worship God in Assemblies.
Men of all sorts of Religions that have ever obtain'd in the World, Jews, Pagans, Mahometans, Christians, have in their Practice acknowledg'd this Obligation. Nor can it be understood how such a Practice should be so Universal, otherwise than from the Dictate and Impression of the Universal Law.

Whereas the Religion profess'd in England, is that of Reformed Christianity; some things are annexed to the allowed Publick Worship, which are acknowledged to be no parts thereof, nor in themselves necessary; but which the Dissenters judg to be in some part Sinful.

They cannot therefore with good Conscience towards God, attend wholly and solely upon the Publick Worship, which the Laws do appoint.

The same Laws do strictly forbid their assembling to Worship God otherwise.

Which is in effect the same thing, as if they who made, or shall continue such Laws, should plainly say, If you will not consent with us in our superadded Rites, and Modes, against your Consciences, you shall not Worship God: Or if you will not accept of our Additions to the Christian Religion, you shall not be Christians; and manifestly tends to reduce to Paganism a great Part of a Christian Nation.

They have been wont therefore to meet however in distinct Assemblies, and to worship God in a way which their Consciences could approve; and have many years continu'd so to do, otherwise than as they have been hindred by Violence.

It is therefore upon the whole fit to enquire,

Q. 1. Whether the Dissenters are to be blamed for their holding distinct Meetings for the worship of God?

For answer to this, It cannot be expected that all the Controversies should be here determined, which have been agitated about the Lawfulness of each of those things which have been added to the Christian Religion and Worship, by the present Constitution of the Church of England.

But supposing they were none of them simply unlawful, while yet the misinformed Minds of the Dissenters could not judg them lawful, tho they have made it much their Business to enquire and search; being urg'd also by very severe Sufferings, which thorough a long Tract of time they have undergone, Not to refuse any means that might tend to their Satisfaction; they could have nothing else left them to do, than to Meet, and worship distinctly as they have.

For they could not but esteem the Obligation of the *Universal, Natural, Divine Law*, by which they were bound solemnly to worship God, less questionable than that of a *Law*, which was only *Positive, Topical, and Humane*, requiring such and such Additaments to their worship, and prohibiting their worship without them.

The Church of England (as that part affects to be called) distinguish'd from the rest by those additionals to Christian Religion, (pretended to be indifferent, and so, confess unnecessary) hath not only sought to Engross to it self the *Ordinances of Divine Worship*, but all *Civil Power*. So that the Priviledges that belong either to *Christian* or *Humane Society*, are inclosed, and made peculiar to such, as are distinguish'd by things that in themselves can signify nothing to the making of Persons either better Christians, or better Men.

Q. 2. Whether the Laws enjoining such Additions to our Religion, as the exclusive Terms of Christian worship and Communion, ought to have been made; when it is acknowledged on all hands, the things to be added, were before not necessary; and when it is known, a great number judg them Sinful, and must thereby be restrained from worshipping the True and Living God?

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A. The Question to any of common Sense, answers it self. For it is not put concerning such as dissent from any Part of the Substance of Worship which God hath commanded; but concerning such Additions as he never commanded. And there are sufficient Tests to distinguish such *Dissenters*, from those that deny any substantial Part of Religion, or assert any thing contrary thereto. Wherefore to forbid such to worship that God that made them, because they cannot receive your devised Additions, is to exclude *that which is necessary*, for the *meer want* of that which is *unnecessary*.

And where is that Man that will adventure to stand forth, and avow the hindering of such Persons from paying their Homage to the God that made them? If we thus expostulate the matter on Gods behalf, and their own; will you cut off from God *his Right* in the Creatures he hath made? Will you cut off from *them* the means of their Salvation, *upon these terms*? What reply can the matter admit?

'Tis commonly alledg'd, That great deference is to be paid to the Laws; and that we ought to have forborn our Assemblies, till the publick Authority recall'd the Laws against them. And we will say the same thing, when it is well proved, that they who made such Laws, made the world too.

And by whose Authority were such Laws made? Is there any, that is not from God? And hath God given any Men authority to make Laws against himself, and to deprive him of his *just Rights* from his own Creatures?

Nor if the matter be well searcht into, could there be so much as a pretence of Authority derived for such purposes from the People, whom every one now acknowledges the *first Receptacle* of derived governing Power. God can, 'tis true, lay indisputable Obligation by his known Laws, upon every Conscience of Man about Religion, or any thing else. And such as represent any People, can according to the Constitution of the Government, make Laws for them about the things they entrust them with. But if the People of England be askt Man by Man, will they say, they did entrust to their *Representatives*, their *Religion*, and their *Consciences*, to do with them what they please? When it is your own turn to be represented by others, is this part of the *Trust* you commit? What Dr. *Sherlock* worthily says, concerning a Bishop, he might (and particularly, after, doth) say, concerning every other Man, *He can be no more represented in a Council, than at the Day of Judgment; every Man's Soul and Conscience must be in his own keeping, and can be represented by no Man.*

Vindication of
some Prote-
stant Prin-
ciples, &c. p. 52.

* As by Nu-
ma, from his
Egeria. And
their Priests
to whom the
Regulation of
such matters
was left, were
generally be-
liev'd to be
inspir'd.

It ought to be considered, That Christianity, wherein it superadds to the Law of Nature, is all matter of Revelation. And 'tis well known, that even among *Pagans*, in the settling Rites and Institutions of Religion*, Revelation was pretended at least, upon an impli'd Principle, that in such matters humane Power could not oblige the Peoples Consciences.

We must be excus'd therefore, if we have in our Practice express less Reverence for Laws made by no Authority received either from God or Man.

We are therefore injuriously reflected on, when it is imputed to us, That we have by the use of our Liberty, acknowledg'd an Illegal Dispensing Power. We have done no other thing herein, than we did when no Dispensation was given or pretended, in Conscience of Duty to him that gave us Breath. Nor did therefore Practice otherwise, because we thought those Laws dispens'd with, but because we thought them not Laws.

Whereupon little need remains of enquiring further,

Q. 3. VWhether such Laws should be continued?

Against which, besides what may be collected from that which hath been said, it is to be considered, that what is most principally grievous to us, was enacted by that Parliament, that as we have too much reason to believe, suffer'd it self to be dealt with, to enslave the Nation in other Respects, as well as this; and which (to his immortal Honour) the Noble Earl of *Danby* procur'd to be Dissolv'd, as the first Step towards our National Deliverance.

And let the Tenour be considered of that horrid Law, by which our *Magna Charta* was torn in Pieces; the worst and most infamous of Mankind, at our own Expence, hired to accuse us; multitudes of Perjuries committed; Convictions made without a Jury, and without any Hearing of the Persons accused; Penalties inflict'd; Goods rifled; Estates seiz'd and imbezeld; Houses broken up; Families disturb'd, often at most unreasonable Hours of the Night, without any Cause, or Shadow of a Cause, if only a malicious Villain would pretend to suspect a Meeting there. No Law in any other Case like this; as if to worship God without those Additions, which were confessed unnecessary, were a greater Crime than Theft, Felony, Murder, or Treason! Is it for our Reputation to Posterity, that the Memory of such a Law should be continued?

And are we not yet awaken'd, and our Eyes open'd enough, to see, that the making and Execution of the Laws, by which we have suffer'd so deeply for many by-past years, was only, That Protestants might destroy Protestants, and the easier work be made for the Introduction of the Popery that was to destroy the Residue.

Nor can any Malice deny, or Ignorance of observing *Englishmen* overlook this plain matter of Fact: After the Dissolution of that beforementioned Parliament, Dissenters were much careld, and endeavour'd to be drawn into a Subserviency to the Court-designs, especially in the Election of after Parliaments. Notwithstanding which, they every where so entirely and unanimously fell in with the sober Part of the Nation in the Choice of such Persons for the three Parliaments that next succeeded (two held at *Westminster*, and that at *Oxford*) as it was known would, and who did most generously Assert the Liberties of the Nation, and the Protestant Religion. VWhich alone (and not our meer dissent from the Church of *England* in Matters of Religion, wherein *Charles II.* was sufficiently

sufficiently known to be a Prince of great indifferency) drew upon us, soon after the Dissolution of the last of those Parliaments, that dreadful Storm of Persecution that destroy'd not a small Number of Lives in Goals, and ruin'd Multitudes of Families.

Let English Freemen remember, what they cannot but know, That it was for our firm adherence to the Civil Interests of the Nation (not for our different Modes of Religion from the Legal way, tho the Laws gave that advantage against us, which they did not against others) that we endur'd the Calamities of so many years.

When, by the late King, some relaxation was given us, what arts and insinuations have been used with us, to draw us into a concurrence to designs tending to the prejudice of the Nation? And with how little effect upon the generality of us, it must be great ignorance not to know, and great injustice to deny.

But he that knows all things, knows, that tho, in such circumstances, there was no opportunity for our receiving publick and authoriz'd promises, when we were all under the eye of watchful jealousy; yet as great assurances as were possible, were given us by some that we hope will now remember it, of a future establish'd security from our former pressures. We were told over and over, when the excellent *Heer Fagell's* Letter came to be privately communicated from hand to hand, how easily better things would be had for us, than *that* encourag'd *Papists* to expect, if ever that happy Change should be brought about, which none have now beheld with greater joy than we.

We are loth to injure those who have made us hope for better, by admitting a suspicion that we shall now be disappointed and deceiv'd (as we have formerly been, and we know by whom) or that we shall suffer from them a *Religious slavery*, for whose sakes we have suffer'd so grievous things, rather than do the least thing that might tend to the bringing upon *them* a *Civil slavery*.

We cannot but expect from English-men, that they be just and true. We hope not to be the only instances, whereby the *Anglica fides*, and the *Punica*, shall be thought all one.

But if we who have constantly desired, and, as we have had opportunity, endeavour'd the saving of the Nation, must however be ruin'd, not to greaten (one hair) the Wealth and Dignity, but only to gratify the humour of them who would yet destroy it; we, who are competently inured to sufferings, shall through God's Mercy be again enabled to endure. But he that sits in the Heavens will, in his own time, judge our Cause, and we will wait his Pleasure; and, we hope, suffer all that can be inflicted, rather than betray the Cause of Reformed Christianity in the World.

But our Affairs are in the hands of Men of Worth and Honour, who apprehend how little grateful a Name they should leave to posterity, or obtain now with good men of any persuasion, if under a pretence of kindness to us, they should now repeat the Arts of ill men in an ill time. Great minds will think it beneath them, to sport themselves with their own cunning in deceiving other men, which were really in the present case too thin not to be seen through, and may be the easie attainment of any Man, that hath enough of opportunity, and integrity little enough for such purposes. And 'tis as much too gross to endeavour to abuse the Authority of a Nation, by going about to make that stoop to so mean a thing, as to make a shew of intending what they resolve to their uttermost shall never be.

But some may think, by Concessions to us, the Church of *England* will be ruin'd, and a great advantage be given to the bringing in of Popery.

To which we say, The generality of the Dissenters differ from the Church of *England* in no Substantials of Doctrine, or Worship, no, nor of Government, provided it be so managed, as to attain its true acknowledg'd end. The favouring of us will therefore as much ruine the Church, as its enlargement, and additional strength will signify to its ruin.

And doth not the World know, that wherein we differ from them, we differ from the *Papists* too? And that, for the most part, wherein they differ from us, they seem to agree with them?

We acknowledg their strong, brave, and prosperous opposition to Popery: But they have oppos'd it by the things wherein they agree with us. Their differences from us are no more a fence against Popery, than an inclosure of Straw is against a flame of fire.

But 'tis wont to be said, we agree not among our selves, and know not what we would have.

And do all that go under the name of the Church of *England* agree among themselves? We can shew more considerable disagreements among them, than any can between the most of us and a very considerable part of them. They all agree, 'tis true, in Conformity; and we all agree in Nonconformity. And is not this meer Accidental to Christianity and Protestantism? And herein is it not well known, that far the greater part of Reformed Christendom do more agree with us?

An arbitrary line of Uniformity in some little Accidents, severs a small part of the Christian world from all the rest: How unreasonably is it expected, that therefore all the rest must in every thing else agree among themselves? Suppose any imaginary line to cut off a little segment from any part of the Terrestrial Globe, 'tis as justly expected, that all the rest of the world should be of one mind. If one part of *England* be Tailors, they might as well expect, that all the people besides should agree to be of one Profession.

Perhaps some imagine it dishonourable to such as have gone before them in the same Ecclesiastical Stations and Dignities, if now any thing should be altered, which their judgments did before approve and think fit.

But we hope that temptation will not prove Invincible, *viz.* of so excessive a modesty, as to be afraid

afraid of seeming wiser, or better natur'd, or of a more Christian temper than their Predecessors.

But the most of us do agree not only with one another, but in the great things above mention'd, with the Church of *England* too: And in short, that that Reproach may cease for ever with those that count it one; They will find with us, when they please to try, a very extensive agreement on the terms of King *Charles* the Second's Declaration about Ecclesiastical Affairs, *An. 1660.*

Q. 4. Whether it be reasonable to exclude, all that in every thing conform not to the Church of *England*, from any part or share of the Civil Power?

The difference, or Nonconformity of many is so minute, that it would be as reasonable, to exclude all whose hair is not of this or that colour.

And what if we should make a determination, by the decision this way or that of any other disputed question that may be of as small concernment to Religion? Suppose it be that of eating Blood; for the decision whereof, one way, there is more pretence from God's Word, than for any point of the disputed Conformity. Would it not be a wise Constitution, that *whosoever thinks it lawful to eat Black-Pudding, shall be capable of no Office, &c?*

But we tremble to think of the *exclusive Sacramental Test*, brought down as low as to the keeper of an Alehouse! Are all fit to approach that sacred Table, whom the fear of ruin, or hope of gain may bring thither? We cannot but often remember with horror, what happened three or four years ago: A Man that led an ill life, but frequented the Church, was observ'd not to come to the Sacrament, and press'd by the Officers to come; he yet declin'd, knowing himself unfit; at length, being threatned and terrified, came: But said to some present at the time of the solemn action, That he came only to avoid being undone; and took them to witness, that what he there receiv'd, he took only as common Bread and VVine, not daring to receive them as the Body and Blood of Christ. 'Tis amazing, that among Christians, so venerable an Institution should be prostituted to the serving of so mean purposes, and so foreign to its true end! And that doing it after the manner of the Church of *England* must be the qualification! as if *England* were another Christendom; or it were a greater thing to conform in every punctilio to the Rules of this Church, than of Christ himself!

But we would fain know whose is that Holy Table? Is it the Table of this or that Party, or the Lord's Table? If the Lord's; are not persons to be admitted, or excluded upon his terms? Never can there be Union or Peace in the Christian world, till we take down our arbitrary Inclosures, and content our selves with those which our common Lord hath set. If he falls under a Curse that alters Mens Landmarks, to alter God's is not likely to infer a Blessing.

The matter is clear as the light of the Sun, that as many persons of excellent worth, sobriety, and godliness, are entirely in the Communion of the Church of *England*; so that there are too many of a worse Character that are of it too; and divers prudent, pious, and sober-minded persons that are not of it. Let common Reason be consulted in this case; Suppose the Tables turn'd, and that the Rule were to be made the contrary way, *viz.* That to do this thing, but not by any means after the manner of the Church of *England*, were to be the qualification; and now suppose one of meaner endowments as a Man and a Christian, do what is required, and not in the way of the Church of *England*; another, that is of much better, do the same thing, in that way; Were it suitable to Prudence or Justice, that because it is done after the way of the Church of *England*, a fitter Man should be reckon'd unqualified? and one of less value be taken for qualified, because he does it a different way? Then is all that solid weight of VVisdom, Diligence, Sobriety and Goodness, to be weigh'd down by a Feather.

It must surely be thought the Prudence of any Government, to comprehend as many useful persons as it can, and no more to deprive it self of the Service of such, for any thing less considerable than those qualifications are by which they are useful, than a Man would tear off from himself the Limbs of his Body for a Spot upon the Skin.

And really, if in our circumstances, we thus narrow our Interest, all the rest of the world will say, That they who would destroy us, do yet find a way to be our instructors, and our common Enemies do teach us our Politicks.

POSTSCRIPT.

THE Names of Mr. Hale of Eaton College, and of a later most renowned Bishop of the Church of *England*, who asserted this Principle [That if things be impos'd under the notion of indifferent, which many think sinful, and a Schism follow thereupon, the Imposers are the Schismatics.] will be great in *England*, as long as their Writings shall live, and good sense can be understood in it.

FINIS.

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